BEYOND THE BROCHURE

Using Visual Storytelling to Improve Navy Recruiting Engagement

Author information

Jonathan Doberenz

Brand and Marketing Professional | Veteran Leader

Marketing Communications | Digital Strategy and Innovation

Project details

Navy Recruiting Station Joplin, Missouri

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Website

jonathandoberenz.com

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Case Study at a Glance

Organization	Navy Recruiting District St. Louis
Location	Navy Recruiting Station Joplin, Missouri
Project Period	May–July 2012, with continued use through January 2015
Recruiting Assignment	January 2012–January 2015
Territory	Multiple communities and school districts across southwestern Missouri and southeastern Kansas
Primary Audience	High school students, recent graduates, prospective applicants, and their families
Challenge	Many prospects had limited awareness of Navy careers, avoided traditional recruiting displays, and expressed concerns about combat, shipboard life, education, housing, travel, and leaving home.
Audience Finding	Existing materials emphasized adventure and elite occupations but did not fully address the practical and emotional questions prospects raised about everyday Navy service.
Strategy	Developed audience-informed visual displays using official Navy photography, career-specific imagery, education and lifestyle information, personal travel photographs, authentic storytelling, and an interactive world map.
Implementation	Used the materials during school visits, office appointments, and walk-in consultations. The displays received command approval, were shared with other recruiters, and remained with the station after my departure.
Documented Production	53 contracts across three consecutive evaluation periods, including 21 contracts during each of two consecutive one-year periods
Performance	Maintained a 1.9 Production Per Recruiter rate during two consecutive evaluation periods. One official evaluation identified this as more than twice the national average.
FY2013 Result	Recruited seven Nuclear Field applicants and was selected as Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year
Recognition	Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Recruiter of the Quarter, two Admiral's Accelerator Awards, and two NRD St. Louis Hall of Fame recognitions

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Executive Summary

I entered Navy recruiting in January 2012 without prior recruiting experience or a formal marketing education. Assigned to Navy Recruiting Station Joplin, Missouri, I managed a geographically dispersed territory across southwestern Missouri and southeastern Kansas. During my first several months, I learned that many students had limited awareness of Navy careers, could not distinguish the Navy from other military services, and associated military service with ground combat, restrictive living conditions, or giving up college.

Through direct conversations, I identified a gap between the information students needed and the messages provided by existing recruiting materials. National materials frequently emphasized special operations and high-adventure occupations. Although these messages appealed to some students, they did not consistently address concerns about careers, education, housing, shipboard life, recreation, travel, and personal freedom. Prospective applicants needed credible visual information that could help them understand Navy opportunities and imagine what serving might realistically look like.

Beginning in late May or early June 2012, I researched official Navy photographs and developed two portable visual displays. The first used career-specific collages to show sailors performing duties within Navy enlisted career fields. The second presented Navy life through images and information about education, housing, recreation, shipboard living, and military benefits. I supplemented the displays with personal travel photographs and an interactive world map showing places visited by members of the recruiting team.

After introducing the materials at schools, presentations, appointments, and office walk-ins, I observed increased student engagement and more opportunities for meaningful conversations and follow-up appointments. The displays received commanding officer approval, were regularly used by other recruiters, and remained with the Joplin station after my departure.

The displays supported a broader relationship-based approach built on preparation, organization, active listening, patience, respect, and personalized communication. My official evaluations document 53 contracts across three consecutive reporting periods. I maintained a 1.9 Production Per Recruiter rate during two consecutive one-year cycles, with one evaluation identifying that performance as more than twice the national average. During fiscal year 2013, I recruited seven Nuclear Field applicants and was selected as the district's Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year.

My performance also resulted in a Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Recruiter of the Quarter recognition, two Admiral's Accelerator Awards, and two district Hall of Fame recognitions. The experience demonstrated how listening to an audience, identifying a communication gap, and presenting credible visual evidence could transform generalized promotion into focused storytelling connected to individual interests and concerns.

Background and Recruiting Environment

Unexpected Path into Recruiting

My path into Navy recruiting began unexpectedly in 2011. After nearly five years and three deployments aboard USS *John C. Stennis* (CVN 74), I received orders to Travis Air Force Base in California. During my final deployment aboard *Stennis*, I learned that the assignment had been canceled because the required security clearance was not expected to be completed within the necessary timeframe. The clearance process required additional review related to my recent marriage to a foreign national.

While my Navy assignment manager searched for another position, I began considering recruiting duty after speaking with sailors who had previously served as recruiters. I was ready to leave the shipboard environment and pursue a different professional challenge. When I requested more information, I learned that I had already been released to the Navy recruiting assignment team and would be assigned to Navy Recruiting Station Joplin, Missouri. Although I had grown up in southeastern Missouri, I knew little about Joplin on the opposite side of the state.

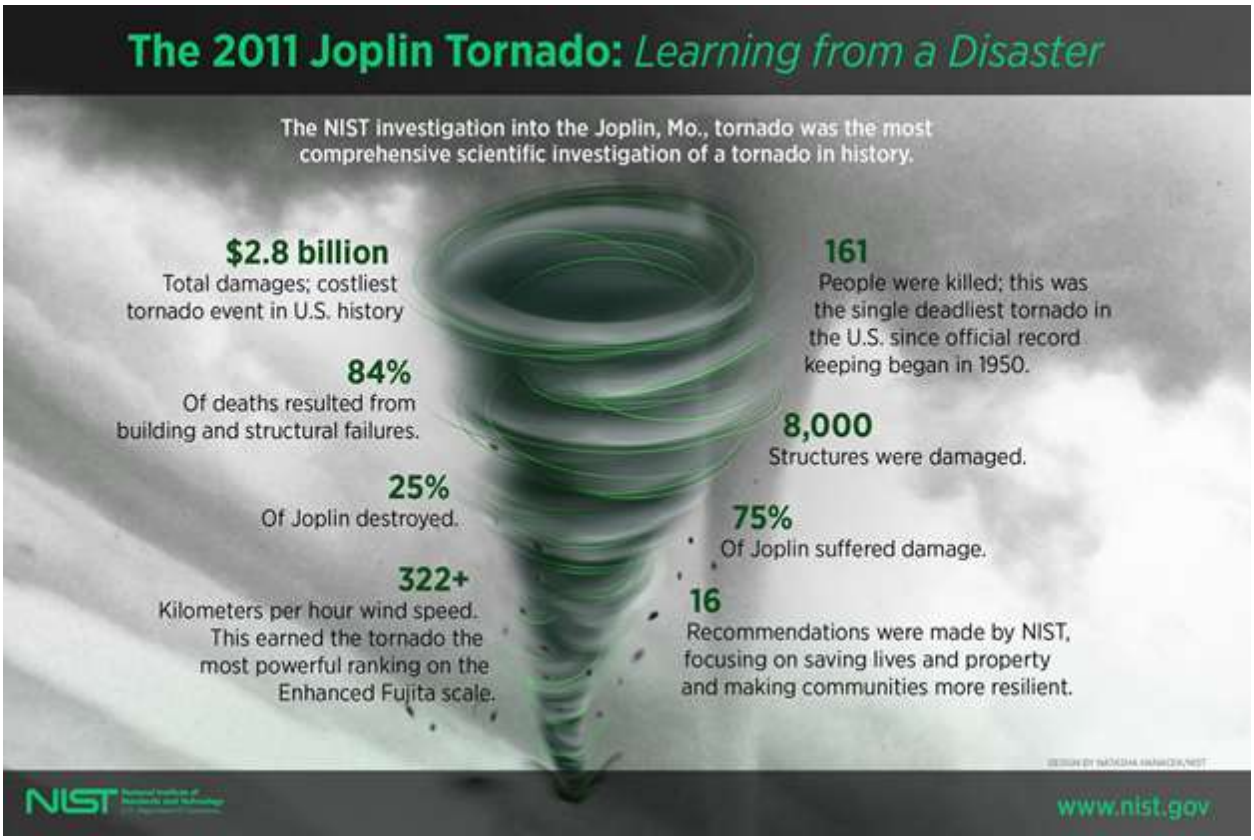
I departed USS *John C. Stennis* in October 2011 and attended Navy recruiting school during November and December. After completing the training, I began working as a recruiter in January 2012.

Joplin and Recruiting Territory

I first visited Joplin in December 2011, approximately seven months after an EF5 tornado struck the city on May 22. Although the recruiting station was not physically damaged, its personnel had temporarily suspended normal operations to assist with rescue efforts and support the community. The station had returned to its regular mission by the time I arrived, but evidence of the disaster remained visible throughout the city.

Along one of Joplin's main roads, buildings and neighborhoods on one side appeared largely untouched, while areas on the other side contained concrete foundations where homes once stood, partially destroyed houses, and widespread evidence of the tornado's path. According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the tornado killed 161 people and damaged approximately 8,000 structures. Approximately 25 percent of Joplin was destroyed, and 75 percent experienced some level of damage. Although the disaster was not the central challenge of my recruiting assignment, it shaped the community environment in which I began building relationships.

Figure 1
The 2011 Joplin Tornado: Learning From a Disaster



Note. The May 22, 2011, EF5 tornado killed 161 people and damaged approximately 8,000 structures. I arrived in Joplin approximately seven months later, when evidence of the disaster remained visible throughout the community. From *The 2011 Joplin Tornado: Learning From a Disaster*, by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, n.d. (https://www.nist.gov/

When I joined Navy Recruiting Station Joplin, the office consisted of two experienced recruiters and me. As its newest member, I initially focused on learning recruiting procedures, understanding the local market, and developing the skills needed to guide prospective applicants through the process. As my experience and performance grew, my responsibilities later expanded into assistant station leadership.

My initial territory included northern Joplin and communities north, northwest, and northeast of the city. It extended across portions of southwestern Missouri, including Carl Junction, Carthage, Nevada, Lamar, El Dorado Springs, Stockton, and Greenfield, as well as southeastern Kansas, including Pittsburg and Fort Scott. Managing this geographically dispersed territory required regular travel, careful scheduling, and relationships with school districts that provided different levels of access and expressed varying degrees of interest in military service.

My first two evaluations documented responsibility for relationships with 21 and 20 high schools, respectively. By my final evaluation period, I was helping support station-level relationships across 46 high schools and seven colleges as an assistant station leader. The later figures reflected expanded leadership responsibilities rather than growth limited to my original individual territory.

Initial Learning Period

My first several months in Joplin were challenging. I had to learn a new profession while becoming familiar with numerous schools, communities, administrators, and prospective applicants. I initially struggled to produce consistent results, but as I gained experience, I progressed into what I considered an average recruiter.

During this period, I observed significant differences in how schools and students responded to military recruiting. Some schools welcomed recruiters and provided meaningful access to students, while others were noticeably less receptive. At certain schools, students avoided approaching my table even when I offered free Navy promotional items. These differences led me to examine why some students were unwilling to begin a conversation. That question became the starting point for the audience research and visual communication strategy I later developed.

Audience Research and Communication Problem

Student Conversations and Observations

As I compared my experiences across schools, I realized that the first challenge was not persuading students to join the Navy. It was getting them to begin a conversation. At some schools, students would not approach my table even when free promotional items were available. Their reluctance suggested that existing perceptions of military service were influencing their behavior before they heard anything I had to say.

At more receptive schools, I began joining students at their lunch tables instead of waiting for them to approach the recruiting display. Rather than opening with a formal pitch, I asked what they wanted to do after high school. These informal conversations allowed me to listen before discussing the Navy and helped me understand the careers, priorities, and concerns influencing their decisions.

Medical and criminal justice careers were among the most frequent responses. Based on repeated conversations, I developed a working theory that familiarity strongly influenced which careers students considered. Healthcare and criminal justice professions were highly visible in television and popular culture, while students also learned about careers through their communities, relatives, and friends. When students could picture what a profession involved, they appeared more likely to view it as a realistic option.

In comparison, many had received limited exposure to careers in information technology, intelligence, administration, logistics, skilled trades, engineering, finance, communications, and other technical or professional fields available through the Navy. These observations did not result from a formal research study, but they revealed a consistent audience-awareness gap across my recruiting territory. Students were unlikely to consider opportunities they did not know existed or could not clearly imagine.

Misconceptions and Message Mismatch

Limited career awareness was only part of the challenge. Some students believed that joining any military service meant being sent directly to Iraq or Afghanistan, while others viewed military service primarily as ground combat. Because many could not clearly distinguish among the military services and components, they sometimes applied perceptions associated with the Army or Marine Corps to the Navy.

Other concerns involved everyday military life. Some students imagined shipboard living as highly restrictive or outdated. Others viewed military service as a last resort for people unable to attend college or find another path after high school. Enlisting was sometimes perceived as requiring them to give up education, recreation, travel freedom, and the possibility of maintaining a normal personal life.

The Navy's existing recruiting materials frequently highlighted occupations such as Navy SEALs, Explosive Ordnance Disposal technicians, Navy Divers, and Aviation Rescue Swimmers. These careers demonstrated courage, service, teamwork, and adventure, but they represented only a small portion of the opportunities and experiences available in the Navy. For some students, the emphasis attracted attention. For others, it reinforced the fears that already kept them from approaching the recruiting table.

The materials showed what the Navy believed would appear exciting, but they did not consistently answer the practical questions students raised about careers, education, housing, shipboard life, recreation, travel, and personal freedom. This created a message mismatch between the experiences being promoted and the information many students needed before they could realistically consider Navy service.

Identified Communication Gap

I concluded that students needed a broader and more realistic picture of the Navy. They needed to see its range of careers, technical training, education benefits, compensation, housing and living conditions, recreation, leave, travel, and opportunities for long-term development. The challenge was not simply to provide more information. It was to present the right information in a form students could understand, trust, and connect to their own goals.

My objective became developing a credible, professional, and portable visual presentation that could attract attention, explain Navy careers and everyday life, address common concerns, and help prospective applicants imagine what service could realistically look like. Although I did not document a formal marketing plan at the time, the materials needed to be visually engaging, easy for students and families to understand, grounded in authentic photographs and credible information, and flexible enough for school visits, presentations, office appointments, and walk-in consultations.

These requirements guided the research, design, and construction of the visual recruiting strategy that followed.

Visual Recruiting Strategy

Research and Content Development

I began developing the visual recruiting project in late May or early June 2012. My first step was searching the photography collection available through Navy.mil. The collection contained official photographs, many credited to Navy Mass Communication Specialists, documenting sailors performing their duties, participating in training, and experiencing daily life throughout the fleet.

I searched for photographs representing each enlisted career field, formally known in the Navy as a rating. Some ratings had numerous images showing different responsibilities and working environments, while others had limited visual representation. As I reviewed the available content, I concluded that one photograph could not adequately explain the variety contained within an entire career field.

Instead, I organized multiple official photographs into individual career collages. Each collage showed sailors performing different responsibilities associated with that rating, making unfamiliar occupations easier to understand. I placed a rating-specific coin image at the center of each collage and arranged the photographs around it using photo-editing software. The finished layouts combined a recognizable career symbol with visual examples of sailors performing the work.

Figure 2
Operations Specialist Coin Image Used in the Original Career Collage



Note. This is the original Operations Specialist coin image I placed at the center of the Operations Specialist career collage. Each Navy rating collage used a different rating-specific coin image with a similar visual style as its central focal point. Operations Specialist was my own enlisted rating.

After completing the digital layouts, I had the images printed and purchased two trifold science-project boards and Navy-themed craft materials. I manually arranged and attached the content to create portable displays that could be transported to schools, presentations, and other

recruiting events. The project required several weeks of researching, selecting, organizing, editing, printing, and assembling. I substantially completed both displays by late July 2012.

Career and Lifestyle Displays

The two presentation boards addressed different but closely connected questions. The first focused on what someone could do in the Navy. The second showed what that person's daily life and overall experience might look like.

The career display introduced students to the range of Navy enlisted occupations. Its collages showed different responsibilities, environments, and activities associated with each rating. Instead of beginning every conversation with a general explanation of the Navy, I could ask students about their interests and direct them toward relevant areas of the display. Someone interested in technology, healthcare, mechanics, intelligence, administration, or another field could see examples connected to that interest. The display helped make the discussion more personal by answering:

What could I do in the Navy?

The lifestyle display addressed concerns about daily life, personal development, and the experience of serving. It included official photographs of sailors participating in shipboard recreation, sports, fitness activities, video games, movies shown in aircraft-carrier hangar bays, and organized events. Other images showed shipboard living spaces, barracks rooms, base housing, and fitness facilities.

Education-related content included college offices aboard ships and on Navy installations, sailors completing courses through the Program for Afloat College Education, and information about Tuition Assistance and the GI Bill. These materials helped prospective applicants understand that Navy service could include education, recreation, personal interests, professional development, and different living arrangements. The second display answered:

What would my life be like in the Navy?

Together, the two displays addressed both the practical and emotional sides of the decision. One helped students explore career possibilities, while the other helped them imagine the broader experience of Navy life.

Travel Photographs and Interactive Map

I considered travel one of the Navy's strongest distinguishing benefits, but I could not find enough official photographs that effectively communicated the range of possible experiences. Rather than leave that benefit underrepresented, I supplemented the official content with photographs from my own travels.

I printed and framed photographs from destinations I had visited and displayed them near my desk in the recruiting office. The collection initially featured places I experienced through

Navy deployments and port visits. After my wife and I traveled independently to Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece, I added photographs from that trip as well.

I explained the distinction between the two forms of travel. Some destinations were places the Navy took me directly through assignments, deployments, and port visits. Others represented personal trips that Navy compensation and leave policies helped make financially and professionally possible. This distinction allowed me to discuss travel honestly while showing how Navy service could create opportunities both on and off duty.

I also purchased a world map and location pins for the recruiting office. The other recruiters and I marked places we had personally visited. During appointments and walk-in conversations, we could point to destinations and describe our experiences. The map transformed travel from a general advertising claim into an interactive conversation supported by the combined experiences of the station.

The photographs and map added authenticity to the broader visual strategy. They supported trust, personal storytelling, and clearer differentiation of the Navy experience while allowing prospective applicants to connect an abstract benefit with real people, places, and experiences.

Implementation and Team Adoption

School and Office Use

After substantially completing the displays in late July 2012, I began taking them to school visits, career events, and recruiting presentations. I noticed a consistent increase in the number of students who approached my table, examined the photographs, and asked questions about specific careers or aspects of Navy life.

The displays created natural conversation starters. Instead of beginning with a broad recruiting pitch, I could respond to the image, career, activity, benefit, or destination that attracted a student's attention. This allowed conversations to begin with the student's priorities rather than mine.

The photographs also helped me address concerns with visual evidence instead of relying only on verbal assurances. When students asked about shipboard living, recreation, education, or other parts of Navy life, I could show official photographs and supporting information. This made unfamiliar experiences easier to understand and helped prospective applicants imagine themselves in similar situations.

The increased engagement led to more substantive conversations and additional follow-up appointments. However, I did not retain separate project-level statistics measuring the exact increase in table traffic, conversations, or appointments. The improvement therefore represents a consistent field observation rather than a calculated percentage. Although authorized Navy systems tracked official prospecting and production activity, I did not preserve a separate record connecting those results specifically to the displays.

When the boards were not being used at schools or recruiting events, they remained displayed inside the Joplin office. Together with the framed travel photographs and interactive world map, they supported scheduled appointments and walk-in consultations. The complete visual system allowed me to explain training, careers, education, living arrangements, shipboard activities, leave, and travel while adapting each conversation to the individual's interests and concerns.

Contemporary Media Feature

In July 2014, while I was still assigned to Navy Recruiting Station Joplin and using the visual materials, *Show Me The Ozarks Magazine* published a profile about my Navy service and recruiting work in an issue honoring military members from southeastern Kansas. The article discussed my efforts to help young people understand the Navy's range of career opportunities and the satisfaction I received from helping individuals recognize possible paths forward.

The profile also highlighted travel as one of my reasons for joining the Navy, including destinations I visited through military service and international trips my wife and I took independently while I was on leave. It addressed the public's limited understanding of military service and my belief that students should receive accurate information about military opportunities alongside college and other career paths.

The article did not specifically document the construction or use of my presentation boards. However, because it was published during my recruiting assignment, it provides independent, contemporary evidence of the career-awareness goals, travel messaging, audience concerns, and relationship-based philosophy that guided my work.

Figure 3
Contemporary Magazine Profile of My Navy Recruiting Work

(a)



(b)



Note. The July 2014 military-themed issue of *Show Me The Ozarks Magazine* included (a) the issue cover and (b) a profile of my work as a Navy recruiter in Joplin, Missouri. The profile discussed Navy career opportunities, travel, education, financial stability, public perceptions of military service, and my work with prospective applicants. From "Jonathan Doberenz," *Show Me The Ozarks Magazine*, 13(11), p. 67, 2014.

Leadership Approval and Station Adoption

During a visit to Navy Recruiting Station Joplin, the commanding officer of Navy Recruiting District St. Louis reviewed the presentation boards. He explained that recruiter-created materials did not always meet the professional standards expected when representing the Navy. After examining my displays, he determined that they were well designed, presented the Navy appropriately, and could remain in use.

His approval confirmed that the materials met leadership expectations while providing a locally developed response to concerns within my recruiting territory. The approval applied to my continued use of the displays; they were not formally adopted or standardized throughout the entire recruiting district.

Other recruiters in the Joplin station observed how students and prospective applicants responded to the materials and regularly borrowed the boards for their own school visits and presentations. Inside the office, the boards, framed photographs, and world map remained available as shared resources. When I later received orders to leave Joplin, the remaining recruiters asked me to leave the boards so they could continue using them.

What began as an individual effort to improve conversations with students became a shared station resource. Command approval established that the displays represented the Navy

professionally, while their continued use by other recruiters demonstrated that the concept could support more than my personal recruiting style.

Relationship-Based Recruiting

Personal Recruiting Approach

The visual displays improved my ability to attract attention, explain Navy opportunities, and address common concerns, but the materials alone did not produce my recruiting success. Their value depended on how I used them to begin conversations, understand individual priorities, and build trust.

My approach relied on organization, preparation, confidence, patience, respect, and active listening. Managing a geographically dispersed territory, maintaining school relationships, supporting applicants through the qualification process, and completing timely follow-up required consistent planning. Preparation and repeated practice also improved my ability to explain Navy careers and benefits clearly while responding honestly to difficult questions.

I learned that an effective recruiting conversation could not be delivered as a standardized pitch. Each person had different goals, concerns, family circumstances, and reasons for considering or rejecting military service. Rather than immediately telling prospects what the Navy offered, I first listened to what they wanted from their future. I could then adapt the discussion and use the displays to connect their interests with relevant careers, education benefits, travel opportunities, or aspects of Navy life.

Not every concern could be resolved through better information. Some prospective applicants did not want to leave their hometowns, families, or friends. Others placed greater trust in the advice of relatives or friends whose military experiences differed from the Navy experience I described. In other cases, their personal goals did not align with military service.

The strategy helped correct misinformation, reduce uncertainty, and explain Navy opportunities more clearly, but it could not eliminate every objection. Building trust required knowing when to continue answering questions and when to respect that the Navy was not the right choice for an individual.

Nuclear Field Recruiting and Referrals

The Navy Nuclear Field offered a technically demanding career path requiring strong academic ability and qualifying test scores. I did not initially use a separate marketing strategy for Nuclear Field prospects. The first challenge was generating enough interest and trust for academically qualified students to take a practice test or complete the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery.

Once candidates entered the testing process and learned that they qualified, they often responded well to the broader value proposition I presented. Advanced technical training, career development, education benefits, stable compensation, and travel opportunities gave them a more complete basis for evaluating Navy service. The displays supported these conversations by showing that a Navy career involved more than the high-risk occupations and combat-related images they might previously have associated with military service.

Trust also generated referrals. One female Nuclear Field Future Sailor introduced me to another academically qualified young woman whom she believed might be interested in the same opportunity. Because the introduction came from someone she knew, I could begin the conversation with an established level of credibility. I explained the available opportunities, guided her through testing and qualification, and helped her evaluate the program. She ultimately selected the Nuclear Field as well.

The referral demonstrated how a positive recruiting relationship could extend beyond one applicant through peer influence and personal credibility. During FY2013, I recruited seven Nuclear Field applicants, resulting in my selection as Navy Recruiting District St. Louis's Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year.

The seven-contract fiscal-year total is separate from the six Nuclear Field contracts documented in my March 16, 2013, through March 15, 2014, evaluation. The figures cover different but overlapping reporting periods and therefore do not conflict.

Documented Results and Recognition

Individual and Team Performance

The visual displays were one component of a broader recruiting approach built on preparation, relationship development, active listening, and personalized communication. Although I did not preserve data isolating the displays' individual effect, my official evaluations document sustained production and professional growth throughout the period in which the materials were used.

Evaluation Period	Contracts	PPR	Additional Documented Results
March 16, 2012–March 15, 2013	21	1.9	Ranked among the district's Top 10 recruiters; recruited 2 Nuclear Field applicants; actively recruited and supported 3 high-quality NROTC applicants
March 16, 2013–March 15, 2014	21	1.9	Ranked #5 among 46 recruiters; recruited 6 Nuclear Field applicants and 6 female applicants within the Navy's upper aptitude category; selected as Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year

March 16, 2014–January 12, 2015	11	1.1	Served in assistant station leadership while continuing personal production through transfer
Total Documented Production	**53**		

Note. The historical evaluation used the term "Female Upper Mental Group" for female applicants who scored within the Navy's higher aptitude categories. The table uses civilian-friendly language while preserving the meaning of the official record.

Production Per Recruiter, or PPR, measured the average number of contracts produced by an individual recruiter over a given period. My evaluations documented a 1.9 PPR during two consecutive one-year reporting cycles. The first described that rate as more than double the national average, while the second again identified it as exceeding the national average. Maintaining the same rate across consecutive periods demonstrated sustained performance rather than success limited to one month or recruiting cycle.

As my responsibilities expanded into assistant station leadership, I helped train, mentor, and coordinate other recruiters while continuing to produce contracts. My evaluations documented contributions to the following station-level results:

Evaluation Period	Active-Duty Objective	Reserve Objective	Nuclear Field Objective
March 16, 2013–March 15, 2014	110%	160%	175%
March 16, 2014–January 12, 2015	109%	125%	400%

These results reflect my progression from a new recruiter learning the market into a consistent individual producer and assistant station leader contributing to the performance and development of the broader team.

Recognition Timeline

My recruiting performance resulted in repeated recognition at the district and Navy Recruiting Command levels. The timing of the awards demonstrates that the results extended across multiple months, quarters, and performance categories.

Period	Recognition
May 2012	NRD St. Louis Hall of Fame recognition
October–December 2012	Commander, Navy Recruiting Command Admiral's Accelerator Award
January–March 2013	Second Commander, Navy Recruiting Command Admiral's Accelerator Award
April–June 2013	NRD St. Louis Recruiter of the Quarter

June 2013	Second NRD St. Louis Hall of Fame recognition
Fiscal Year 2013	NRD St. Louis Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year
November 2013	Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal for service from October 2012 through September 2013

The May 2012 Hall of Fame recognition documented progress only several months after I began recruiting. The consecutive Admiral's Accelerator Awards, Recruiter of the Quarter selection, second Hall of Fame recognition, and Nuclear Recruiter of the Year award demonstrate continued performance throughout FY2013.

Featured Recognition

The FY2013 Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year trophy and Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal provide physical documentation of two distinct achievements. The trophy recognizes specialized Nuclear Field production, while the medal validates the quality and broader effect of my recruiting performance.

Figure 4
FY2013 Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year Trophy



Note. I received this trophy after being selected as Navy Recruiting District St. Louis's Enlisted Nuclear Recruiter of the Year for FY2013. The recognition resulted from recruiting seven Nuclear Field applicants during the fiscal year.

Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal

The Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal represents the highest-level recognition associated with this recruiting period. Its citation recognized outstanding recruiting results, exemplary and highly professional recruiting practices, salesmanship, recruiting techniques, contributions to command production goals, and positive influence on fellow recruiters. It also stated that my example inspired peers to pursue higher levels of excellence and served as a motivational influence on their recruiting success.

The medal is important to this case study because it validates more than individual contract production. It confirms that Navy leadership recognized both my recruiting approach and its contribution to the performance of the larger team.

Figure 5
Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal for Recruiting Performance



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY HAS AWARDED THE

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS COMMENDATION MEDAL

TO

OPERATION SPECIALIST FIRST CLASS (SURFACE WARFARE) JONATHAN A. DOBERENZ, UNITED STATES NAVY

FOR

MERITORIOUS SERVICE AS A RECRUITER AT NAVY RECRUITING DISTRICT ST. LOUIS FROM OCTOBER 2012 TO SEPTEMBER 2013. PETTY OFFICER DOBERENZ ATTAINED OUTSTANDING RECRUITING RESULTS DISTINGUISHED BY EXEMPLARY AND HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL RECRUITING PRACTICES. DEMONSTRATING SUPERB SALESMANSHIP AND EXPERT RECRUITING TECHNIQUES, HE GREATLY CONTRIBUTED TO A TEAM EFFORT IN SETTING A PHENOMENAL PRODUCTION PACE RESULTING IN THE ATTAINMENT OF NUMEROUS COMMAND GOALS. HIS PERSONAL EXAMPLE INSPIRED HIS PEERS TO STRIVE FOR HIGHER LEVELS OF EXCELLENCE AND PROVIDED A MOTIVATIONAL CATALYST FOR THEIR RECRUITING SUCCESS. BY HIS NOTEWORTHY ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PERSEVERANCE, AND DEVOTION TO DUTY, PETTY OFFICER DOBERENZ REFLECTED CREDIT UPON HIMSELF AND UPHELD THE HIGHEST TRADITIONS OF THE UNITED STATES NAVAL SERVICE.

GIVEN THIS 26TH DAY OF NOVEMBER 2013

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

FOR THE
S. M. MCNINCH
CAPTAIN, U.S. NAVY
COMMANDER, NAVY RECRUITING REGION WEST

NAVSO 1650/11 (REV. 7-99)
S/N 0104-LF-982-1800

Note. The Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal recognized my meritorious service as a recruiter at Navy Recruiting District St. Louis from October 2012 through September 2013. The displayed certificate was digitally restored from the official service-record copy to improve its legibility.

Marketing and Leadership Competencies

I developed this approach before completing my formal marketing education, but the decisions and actions documented in this case study demonstrate competencies that transfer directly into civilian marketing, communications, and leadership roles.

Audience Research and Strategy

Case-Study Action	Civilian Competency
Spoke directly with students about their goals, interests, and concerns	Informal audience research and customer discovery
Compared engagement across different schools and communities	Audience and market segmentation

Identified recurring misconceptions about Navy and military service	Brand-perception and audience-barrier analysis
Assessed whether existing materials addressed local audience needs	Marketing communications assessment
Connected Navy opportunities with individual priorities	Audience-focused message strategy
Adjusted conversations based on different interests and concerns	Consultative and personalized communication

Content and Engagement

Case-Study Action	Civilian Competency
Researched and selected official Navy photographs	Content research and credible asset sourcing
Organized career photographs into rating-specific collages	Content organization and visual storytelling
Created separate career and lifestyle displays	Message segmentation and content development
Used personal travel experiences to support Navy messaging	Authentic brand storytelling
Added an interactive world map showing recruiter travel	Experiential communication and social proof
Used the displays during school visits, appointments, and walk-ins	Field marketing and audience engagement
Generated referrals through positive Future Sailor relationships	Referral marketing and trust development

Leadership and Performance

Case-Study Action	Civilian Competency
Presented the locally developed materials for commanding officer review	Stakeholder communication and approval management
Made the displays available to other recruiters	Team enablement and resource sharing
Left the displays with the station for continued use	Knowledge transfer and resource sustainability
Evaluated production through established PPR and contract metrics	Performance interpretation and results assessment
Progressed into assistant station leadership	Team leadership, training, and mentoring
Contributed to station-level recruiting goals while maintaining individual production	Team performance and operational accountability

Together, these competencies demonstrate my ability to identify an audience problem, develop and implement a practical communication solution, earn stakeholder approval, support team adoption, and contribute to measurable results.

Reflection and Lessons Learned

What the Experience Taught Me

My recruiting experience taught me that effective communication begins with listening. I initially approached recruiting as a process of explaining what the Navy offered. Over time, I learned that I first needed to understand what each person wanted, feared, misunderstood, or valued. Only then could I determine which information was relevant and how to present it effectively.

I also learned that promotional materials can attract attention while still failing to address the audience's concerns. Images of elite occupations and high-adventure experiences appealed to some students but reinforced fears about danger and combat for others. Effective marketing requires more than creating excitement. It must account for existing perceptions and provide information that helps the audience make an informed decision.

Visual evidence made unfamiliar experiences easier to understand. Photographs of careers, education, housing, recreation, and shipboard life helped prospective applicants picture opportunities they had never encountered. My travel photographs and personal stories strengthened that information by connecting the Navy's broader message with experiences I could describe firsthand.

The project also demonstrated the value of responsible local adaptation. National materials addressed a broad audience, but students in my territory raised specific questions those materials did not always answer. By using official photographs and accurate information, I supplemented the national message without misrepresenting the Navy. I also learned that not every concern could or should be overcome. Some students valued remaining near family and friends, while others had goals that did not align with military service. Respecting those priorities was essential to maintaining trust.

Finally, an effective idea becomes more valuable when others can use it. The displays began as a personal solution but developed into shared station resources that remained in use after my departure. Their adoption reinforced that strong results depended on both effective materials and genuine relationship building.

What I Would Do Differently Today

If I recreated the project today, I would use artificial intelligence as a creative and analytical assistant. AI could help organize official content, identify information gaps, explore common applicant concerns, and create more polished visual layouts. It could also suggest alternative ways to explain complicated career and benefit information to different audiences. However, I would continue relying on personal conversations and human judgment to

understand each individual. AI should support the communication process rather than replace the trust developed through direct interaction.

I would also document the creative project more carefully. I would photograph each version of the displays, preserve examples of the completed materials, record leadership feedback and team adoption, and document both successful and unsuccessful messaging approaches. I would connect that project history with approved, nonidentifying performance information already captured through authorized recruiting systems.

I would not retain applicant names, test scores, medical information, or other protected information outside official systems. Better documentation should improve evaluation without compromising applicants' privacy.

Primary documentation lesson. My documentation gap was not a failure to record recruiting activities, appointments, referrals, or conversions within Navy systems. It was my failure to preserve the creative project and connect its development with the performance data already being collected. Because I did not photograph or retain the original displays, I can document the problem, strategy, implementation, and results, but I cannot show the finished project exactly as it appeared in 2012. This limitation reinforced a practical lesson: meaningful work should be preserved responsibly while it is still available, especially when it may later demonstrate creative thinking, professional growth, or measurable impact.

References

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